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ABSTRACT

The role of the public library in providing supplementary materials and services to those still in school, and offering opportunities for continuing education to the public at large is explored. Challenges facing public libraries as they attempt to respond to "A Nation at Risk" are discussed, including the decline of literacy in the information society, the constriction of economic support for public libraries, and the increased similarity of available information. A review is presented of public library developments that offer optimism for the public library's ability to meet these challenges: a shift from an institutional to a client orientation; rethinking of the public library mission; and reorganization and cooperation for increased effectiveness. Continuing constraints under which public libraries struggle are addressed, including continuing economic pressure, perceived irrelevance, and lack of training and skills in library staff. Recommendations are made regarding content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, leadership, and fiscal support in public libraries. (JD)

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Public Libraries and Excellence: The Public Library Response to A Nation at Risk

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SP 024 903

The year 1983 may well be remembered as the year of the educational commission report. At least eight major reports were issued from such organizations as The College Board, The Education Commission of the States, and the Business-Higher Education Forum, with titles that urge "Action for Excellence," warn of "America's Competitive Challenge," and declare "A Nation at Risk."[1]

The reports seem unanimous that the American educational system, if not failing, should certainly be put on probation.

These reports, and in particular, The National Commission on Excellence in Education report, A Nation at Risk, have promoted a wide and welcome discussion of American education. It is in this context that the educational role of the public library is being examined. Like public schools, public libraries can do better to promote the realization of educational excellence for their communities.

A Nation at Risk, is concerned primarily with secondary schools. It charges that the graduates of those schools are inadequately prepared for higher education or for employment. It recommends specific changes in the areas of educational content levels of performance to be achieved, amount of time to be dedicated to education, competencies and rewards for teachers, and quality of leadership and fiscal support. The report warns that the quality of American life, the effectiveness of our

democratic society, and the ability to compete in the world economy are all threatened.

This paper discusses the roles public libraries may take in responding to those issues. However, the educational role of the public library may not be obvious. If the focus of the report is on secondary schools, what role does the public library have in reducing the risks the report puts forth?

Public libraries are one part of the complex educational enterprise of the United States. The purpose of that enterprise is a knowledgeable and skilled populace; and the reports warn that the purpose is not being achieved. A Nation at Risk focusses on one means for achieving that purpose, the nation's public schools; but schools have only partial access to the populace for a limited period of their lives.

The public library is an egalitarian institution. It provides the means by which all members of society can inform themselves, can learn new skills, can investigate opportunities, can encounter varying viewpoints on personal and social issues. To the degree that individuals in our society do not possess the abilities to benefit from public library resources, they are, as the report proclaims, "effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national

life." If people are not competent to use public library resources, the public library cannot succeed in its egalitarian mission.

The public library has a close relationship to both formal and informal education. Public libraries provide supplementary materials and services to those still in school. And when public library clients leave high school at the end of the first quarter of their lives, the public library is the single institution that freely provides "continuing education" for those clients for the remaining three quarters. To the extent that high school graduates are ill-prepared, the public library, in cooperation with other agencies, has the obligation to see to it that those graduates gain the skills to continue to learn.

A report from the Business Higher Education Forum points out that "today's adults will still constitute over 90 per cent of the work force in the year 1990 and over 75 percent of the work force in the year 2000."[2] We cannot look only to the secondary schools for the needed improvements in the educational level of our work force. A spectrum of agencies, with the public library in a prominent position, must address the continuing education of this public.

Public libraries serve the educated very well, and are most

used by those most educated. Some have even suggested that public libraries should deliberately concentrate their attention on the better educated user and not attempt to serve those less able to use libraries. However, A Nation at Risk warns us that the educated elite have become a smaller proportion of the U.S. population. And such arguments ignore the interdependencies within a democratic society. If those most in need of public library services are reluctant to use libraries, then librarians must be more bold in the design of needed services that will be used.

The intent of this paper is to explore the public library's role in responding to the call for excellence as described in A Nation at Risk. To prepare for this assessment, the paper will discuss some of the particular challenges facing public libraries as they attempt to respond. These challenges are the decline of literacy in the information society, the constriction in economic support for public libraries, and the increased sameness of available information. Developments in public libraries that offer optimism for the public library's ability to respond will then be reviewed: a shift from an institutional to a client orientation, rethinking of the public library mission, and reorganization and cooperation for increased effectiveness. The continuing constraints under which public libraries struggle will be addressed in order to point out present limits to their

ability to respond: continuing economic pressure, perceived irrelevance, and lack of training and skills. The recommendations for public library response have been organized in parallel with those in A Nation at Risk: recommendations regarding content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, and leadership and fiscal support.

Public libraries are a critical resource for reducing the risks identified in A Nation at Risk and for supporting excellence. For them to function effectively in this endeavor requires a renewal of commitment and recognition by kindred agencies and their communities.

I. CHALLENGES FACING PUBLIC LIBRARIES

A. Decline of Literacy in the Information Society

Probably the most serious challenge for public libraries is the 23 million functionally illiterate American adults. (The estimate of "13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate" warns that the problem will be persistent.)[3]

Problems that functional illiteracy brings for adults in terms of inability to participate in social decision-making, to grow in their work, to renew themselves in their leisure, do not

need to be detailed here. Adult illiteracy is intolerable in our information society. The problem, however, has been an orphan. No government agency has taken the problem to be their own and the secondary and post-secondary schools say that these adults no longer are their clientele. Librarians say that they cannot function as teachers -- that they have neither the numbers or type of staff required to address the problem which is compounded by the illiterate adult's reluctance to admit to the deficiency. As a result, illiteracy has been addressed by heroic, undersupported, volunteer-intensive, adult education programs.

Adult functional illiteracy has been recognized for at least ten years, but efforts to date have not altered the size of the problem. It now seems clear that major and coordinated efforts will be required. The State of Kentucky, which estimates that 440,000 of its adult citizens are illiterate, has formed the Kentucky Coalition for Literacy, Inc., an organization that will foster the development of local literacy programs. Since no single local agency addresses the literacy problem, the Kentucky Coalition identifies those local agencies interested in literacy and fosters coordination of efforts. B. Dalton Bookseller has announced a $3 million grants program to fund community literacy programs. The chief executive office of B. Dalton estimates that "In dollar terms alone, adult illiteracy is costing the country an estimated $225 billion annually in lost industrial

productivity, unrealized tax revenues, welfare, prisons, crime, and related social ills."[4]

Promotional campaigns of public libraries repeatedly urge reading ("Get into books!" "Be all you can be, read!" "You are what you read."), but public libraries themselves have yet to play a major role in the achievement of adult literacy.

B. Constriction in Economic Support for Public Libraries

When public funds seemed ample (1960s), public library needs for funding were seldom questioned. However, as public funds have become more precious, public libraries have a difficult time maintaining previous levels of support. An annual survey of public library expenditures showed that 1982 expenditures remained below the purchasing power of 2977 and 1978.[5] City and county administrators encourage the saving of public funds; institution of user fees for services is rewarded. When the focus on the educational role of the public library is lost, the rationale for public funding of public library services becomes blurred. Without the educational role, public libraries seem just another community amenity, like community swimming pools or parks.

Focussing on the need for excellence in education recalls why public libraries are publicly supported. Since use of a

public library is voluntary, it is assumed that an individual uses it because there is some individual or private benefit to be gained. If the benefits were solely private, each individual would be expected to bear the cost of those individual benefits. However, there is, in addition to the individual benefit from library use, a societal benefit. Society benefits because the student has used public library materials to supplement school work, or because a homeowner has learned how to insulate an attic, or because a business person has identified firms to whom to market a product, or because someone attending a program on aging is better able to understand an aging relative. When there are social benefits in addition to individual benefits, it is in the social interest to support library services. If society did not provide support, then individuals would use the library less than is desirable in terms of society's goals.

We intuitively understand this argument when it is applied to schools and have mandated in law that schools must be supported and have even required attendance. In contrast, legislation for taxation to support public libraries is permissive, not mandatory; use of a public library is voluntary, not required. This voluntary nature of public library support and use has lead to the unfortunate notion that library services themselves, although probably desirable, are not crucial.

Funding levels are almost entirely determined at the local level. For example, in 1977, 75% of funds for public libraries came from local sources.[6] Data for that same year show 26% of public libraries expended less than $3 per person per year in their communities while 19% expended $9 or over per person. This disparity in locally determined levels of service produces a marked inequality in educational services offered through public libraries.

As a consequence of increasing economic difficulties libraries are retrenching in terms of the library's role and services. Programs have been "laid off" on the basis of seniority: the new programs are the first to go, and innovation has not always taken root. These newer programs, often programs extending services to new and/or disenfranchised users, were accepted by library administrators and local funders while they attracted federal or state funds, but frequently were not seen as central to the community goals and objectives. Particularly relevant to the A Nation at Risk report is the elimination of positions specializing in services to young adults as professional staffs are reduced. Services for young adults are likewise being eliminated or being reassigned to librarians with no preparation for such services. Collections of young adult resources are merged with the general collection with no staff

able to guide young adult users to them.

C. Increased Sameness of Available Information →

Television has been criticized as a medium for delivering the same message over and over. A number of pressures are resulting in the same being true for other media, most notably publishing as illustrated by the following points:

- tax laws require that publishers pay a tax on their inventories of unsold books. This means that publishers cannot afford to publish the title which appeals to a limited audience and which will take years to sell out. Publishers are driven to titles with the widest appeal which will sell out quickly.

- franchise-operated, chain bookstores in shopping malls across the country are designed around the concept of high volumes sales. Similar stock appears in most stores based on inventories managed regionally or even nationally. Space on the most prominent shelves is available to publishers to move their current large quantity, heavily promoted titles. Slower moving titles are relegated to lower shelves or may be removed from the book store stock entirely.

- a successful author has been told by an editor that the publishing house will bring out titles in only five areas in

the future: movie star biographies, diet books, cookbooks, romances, and specialty books for pre-determined audiences. These are areas with a perennially large market.

- publishing is more and more coordinated with "package deals" in which the book title is repackaged into magazine articles, film, or television, so that each appearance promotes the others. Media spin-off products further homogenize information and entertainment, creating brand-name recognition and consumer demand based on familiarity with the general rather than the specific, the unique, or the unusual.

- citizen interest groups seek to control what information will be available in our public schools, public libraries, and media: pictures of communist leaders are removed from textbooks; scientific theories that conflict with religious beliefs are muted; dictionaries that include present language usage are removed from approved lists; school editions of prize-winning books are republished in expurgated form; textbook review committees in a few large states affect what textbook publishers will offer and therefore limit what is available in all states.

The public library has had the mission of enhancing the diversity of information available to citizens. In the past it

has been able to do this chiefly by relying on trade publishers. Since trade publishers are increasingly concentrating their areas of interest, public libraries have the challenge of identifying and filling in the gaps. This represents a considerable task for public libraries. Since (as of 1978) "3.3 percent of 6000-plus companies control about 70 percent of the publishing industry's volume,"[7] public library book selectors will also have to select materials from the other, less visible 5800 publishers to provide a diversity of subjects and viewpoints.

This challenge comes at a time when the availability of information from the federal government is being curtailed. Government agencies are urged to charge publication prices that would be high enough to recover costs. Government information services and publications are reviewed for feasibility of transfer to the private sector. The government's two biggest collectors of statistics, The Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, have cut programs (as of May 1982) because of budget reductions. The Federal Register annual subscription increased from $75 to $300; the Congressional Record from $75 to $208.[8]

In contrast to the increasing sameness from mainstream publishers, the amount of information published each year has increased dramatically. The number of titles produced annually

by American publishers has tripled in the last twenty years, reaching close to 50,000 titles in 1982.[9] Limitations on overall public library budgets and increasing operating costs have brought budgets for materials from 19% of annual expenditures in 1970 to 15% in 1982.[10] The average cost of a new book title in 1982 was $30.59. The average cost of a juvenile title has jumped from 45 cents in 1962 to $8.87 in 1982. The effect of this increase in book production and cost coupled with libraries' decreasing purchasing power means that public libraries have been able to purchase less of what is published.

II. DEVELOPMENTS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

A. Shift from Institutional to Client Orientation

Public libraries in the United States once were guided by standards that indicated, for instance, the number of books they should have, the size of the building, and the number of staff. These standards related to the institution, not to its clients. These standards didn't evaluate whether the books were used, whether the building was inviting, or whether the staff members were helpful. The library community had faith that increased resources would in themselves lead to better service.

As public librarians considered revising these standards they understood that a new form of guideline would be needed.

The first recommendation in the new guidelines was that local public libraries should use citizen committees to help them plan appropriate local public library services.[11] This planning process is to be repeated over the years to ensure that services remain appropriate. The more recent recommendation is that public libraries, in addition to planning, should systematically measure the level of services provided to the community. A manual of standardized procedures has been provided.[12] Libraries will be able to compare their levels of service with libraries in similar communities with similar objectives.

The shift has been from an emphasis on what the community gives to the library to also include what the library gives to the community. This progression in public libraries is continuing, and it encourages public libraries to be more responsive to the challenges of supporting a learning society.

B. Rethinking of the Public Library Mission

The shift from an institution orientation to a client orientation and continuing economic stringency have brought about a rethinking of the public library's mission. The Public Library Mission Statement and Its Imperatives for Service[13] pointed out that runaway social change, exponential growth in the record, total egalitarianism, and depletion of natural resources, all

require the design of a renewed institution that will be responsive to today's conditions. Lowell Martin has enumerated the multiple missions that public libraries have attempted to perform simultaneously: "the People's University, the student's auxiliary, the children's door to reading, the free book store, the information agency, the scholar's workshop, and the community center."[14] A Planning Process for Public Libraries instructs the planning library to create a specific local mission statement that says what the local library will be for its community in the next few years.

This attention to the mission of the public library is healthy and has prepared the way for considering this recent challenge: What public library mission will support the improvement of secondary education and provide for the lifelong support of the Learning Society?

C. Reorganization and Cooperation for Increased Effectiveness

The challenge of providing resources to support life-long learning is beyond the capacity of most individual communities. In 1977, 65% of the public libraries in the United States served communities of 10,000 or less, with average receipts in 1977-78 of less than $23,000.[15]

Public Libraries have employed a variety of devices to

obtain the resources necessary for service. In some states, community libraries have combined to form consolidated county systems; in others, federated library systems have been formed. Public Library Association standards and state library agencies have promoted the formation of these cooperative library systems to centralize such functions as inter-library lending, audio-visual resources, staff development, and centralized purchasing.

Even for those libraries still organized at the community level, inter-library lending can supplement resources. Systems and state library agencies have established state and regional networks so that the most isolated communities have an access point to the resources of the nation's libraries. The proportion of inter-library loans to total circulation is low (estimated at 3%), but this service often represents access to critically needed materials.

III. CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITING REALITIES

A. Continuing Economic Pressure

The economic pressures on libraries are continuing. The library press regularly reports bake sales, book sales, celebrity shoe sales, auctions, and other fund raising events that attempt locally to make up for cuts in governmental support. Foundations

are being asked to fill in the gap between service needs and budget levels. Volunteers are being sought to make up for lack of staff. Retirements or other staff terminations leave positions not filled, with responsibilities reassigned to a smaller staff, often untrained for the added professional load. The library is praised for increasing productivity, that is for doing more with less.

These responses to declining tax dollars have some benefits: community interest and support are made evident, foundation monies are received by a few, libraries are rethinking programs and procedures. However, each of these responses is a short term solution: fund raising events have only so much appeal; foundations are not interested in sustaining contributions over years; volunteers need continuously to be recruited and trained; there are limits to how much productivity can be increased. The reality is that the economic pressures are going to continue, and libraries may have to become more effective in demonstrating what they return for the tax dollar, i.e., through programs that contribute to the community's economic base: literacy, child care and nutrition, family planning.

B. Perceived Irrelevance

The public library is intended to be the community agency to which its citizens will turn when they have questions or need

information. But a number of studies have found that less than 5% of U.S. adults name the public library as a place they think to go for information.[16] This is true for a wide range of topics about which citizens have concerns: education, social issues, housing, and occupational choices are examples. This is much less than the number who use public libraries; the average community can expect that almost half of its adults will visit or phone the library in a year. But when asked to think of places to get information, less than 5% name the public library.

We are challenged, therefore, to increase the public awareness of how the public library can function for them.

C. Lack of Training and Skills

A continuing problem for communities served by public libraries is a lack of trained staff. The 65% of public libraries which serve communities of 10,000 or less have an average of less than two full-time-equivalent staff per library. Only 19% of these staff have a graduate degree.[17] Less than 19% can be assumed to have a graduate degree from an accredited library program. This means that the great majority of small public libraries are staffed by persons with inadequate preparation.

For those public library staff with graduate training, rapid

developments in the application of automation to library cataloging, retrieval, and circulation procedures require that their training be updated. When libraries are under-staffed and staff under-rewarded, there is little time or motivation to gain new skills.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Diversify Content

A Nation at Risk charges that "secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused" and recommends a strong preparation in five "New Basics": English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science. Public libraries may choose to take the objectives for each of these basics as criteria for the selection of materials and services. Not only might public libraries have materials and services to support students acquiring this content, they should also have materials and services which will enable those no longer in school to acquire these basics, and which will enable the graduates from basic programs to be currently and continuously effective in their knowledge.

Public libraries also have a unique mission to go beyond these basics to provide a great diversity of content for their communities. In the Learning Society, public libraries need to

be the community's learning and inquiring center. Libraries need to continue their provision of access to materials in collections other than their own. Libraries need to respond to the increasing sameness of main stream publishing by enhancing these offerings with alternative publications.[18] Public libraries can add the service of obtaining access to published and unpublished materials from governmental agencies and to become much more active in the use of the Freedom of Information Act on behalf of their patrons.

B. Standards and Expectations

A Nation At Risk found that the expectations for achievement have been dangerously lowered and recommends greater emphasis on achievement and higher standards for admission to college. Public libraries have commonly provided information on college opportunities and will be an important informant regarding new standards. As part of the coalition promoting educational excellence, public libraries can support efforts in their communities to reform curricula and spur increased achievement. For adult learners, public libraries can continue their support for General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Exams. Public libraries can also promote excellence in learning through strengthened Learner's Advisory Programs.

C. Time

A Nation at Risk finds that too little time is spent in school, that the time spent is not effectively used, and that students are not well prepared to work independently. The report recommends longer school days, more days of school, and more homework.

The school library or media center has the primary mission of providing resources to support the school's curriculum. In general, the public library mission regarding students in public schools is to provide supplementary or recreational resources. However, community situations and resources vary and no single delineation of missions will serve. Some areas have strong school resources; others do not. Some communities have neighborhood schools with extended hours for library service; others bus a significant proportion of students or close the library at the end of the school day.

The public library can promote educational excellence for its community by planning jointly with community schools for the information requirements of students. In some cases, such planning has resulted in public library staff serving in the school library after school hours. In other cases, public libraries have homework hotlines for students to call in the evening. Public libraries can play a major role in assisting

students and encouraging them to work independently, implying a need for staff trained to provide such services. In addition, public libraries can continue to provide programs over the summer which will allow students to acquire the "New Basics" or to encourage reading with supplementary materials.

A contribution that public libraries can make regarding time is to be open for service when most needed. In a state where public library services are fairly well developed, only 58% of libraries serving 5000 people or less report being open even one evening per week.[19] Figures from 1977 show that only 8% of U.S. public libraries are open seven days a week; 61% of the libraries serving 10,000 or fewer persons are open five days weekly or less. The majority of libraries (61%) are open less than 8 hours daily.[20] If public libraries are to serve the needs of school students and working adults, they need to design hours of service that expand beyond the school day or normal work day.

D. Teaching

The findings and recommendations of A Nation at Risk addressed to teaching relate to poor preparation, inadequate incentives, and the absence of a career ladder. Public libraries have no direct effect on those problems. However, teachers use public libraries for their own course work and professional

development. Public libraries can link teachers with the literature of education and of their subject areas. In addition, libraries are frequently used by teachers as sources of materials to support their classroom teaching. Public libraries could plan more actively with teachers (as well as school librarians) than they do now. Questions to be addressed might include: What materials the public library needs to have in order to support or supplement homework assignments, what assignments will be coming up in the next year, what levels of assistance to students will aid learning. Such a recommendation to actively support public education clearly implies need for additional professional staff and for a clarification of roles among the library, classroom teachers, and school media centers.

The report deals with classroom teachers. Public libraries can also actively support the efforts of literacy instructors and other trainers in business and community organizations with relevant materials and, where appropriate classroom facilities.

In academic libraries, there is a current emphasis on bibliographic instruction (that is, instruction in the use of libraries and library resources) provided by the library for the students. Public libraries can support school performance and post-secondary learning by offering an analogous service. The objectives of such a program should be to aid users in

identifying the information aspects of a problem, to alert users to the capabilities of the library, and to inform users of the diversity of information sources available, as well as to train users in the use of the public library and information handling technologies.

When addressing the problem of quality teaching staff, the quality of the library staff as teachers cannot be ignored. Professional public libraries have training and experience in the service of patron requests for information whether the request is for a specific document or for general introduction to a subject of interest. If public library staff are to take a more active role in instructing users, additional training should be provided in instructional strategies, in motivating learners, and in readers' advisory skills.

But, in addition to providing continuing education for public library professionals, the absence of professionally qualified librarians in many of our public libraries schould be addressed. States have been reluctant to impose educational requirements for library directors and staff on local library boards. People living in our smaller communities use libraries staffed with people with no formal library training. We cannot expect an institution with untrained personnel to be able to respond to a challenge to excellence.

E. Leadership and Fiscal Support

Recommendations in A Nation at Risk point to the educational leadership role of local, state, and national school officials and the funding and governance role of school board members, governors, and legislatures. Public libraries can be involved in the leadership and fiscal support for education on a number of levels.

At the local and state level, public libraries can be active members of a support coalition both for education in the public schools and for education in the community at large. They can assist principals and superintendents in articulating the case for needed educational reforms. They can also help state the case for strengthening the full range of educational programs in the community, from day-care education through adult literacy programs, whether or not they are formally associated with the library.

At the local level, the public library is an ideal sponsor for community forums on the state of education in the community. The forums could focus on such themes as the findings of a community survey of educational attainments, educational opportunities for the physically or mentally handicapped, pre-school or adult education resources, or vocational education. The point of the forums would be to discuss education

as a community, rather than an institutional concern.

At both the local and state levels, public library representatives can make the case for excellence of public library services, and can make clear both the organizational patterns and the funding levels necessary to support excellence.

At the state level, the state library agency should assess the needs for public libraries not only to reach adequacy but to foster excellence. As educational institutions in the state, public libraries deserve greater attention and funding from state legislatures. The case for tax support for public education is well established. The decisions regarding levels of support are purposely made long term by mandating support in state law. Public libraries, in contrast, are seen as optional and their support is decided almost entirely by the local jurisdiction in an annual process. To the extent that a case can be made for the public library's educational function, a case can also be made for a substantial state role in funding. With at least 23 million adult illiterates, the state cannot cease its interest in education at the twelfth grade.

The importance of the public library as an educational institution needs to be given stronger voice at the federal level. This paper has been prepared as part of a federal expression of interest. The placement of the federal agency in

support of public libraries is in the U.S. Department of Education acknowledges the public library's educational mission. But there is a need for a renewed expression of the public library's place in the educational enterprise and a federal commitment to help libraries move beyond the near ground of adequacy to support the excellence attainable at the horizon.

F. The Public Library Role in Planning

In A Nation at Risk, libraries are cited in passing in the report as a member of the "array of educational organizations." But the public library is a tax-supported information agency that is accountable to all the residents of its community. It has the responsibility to see that the information requirements of all residents of the Learning Society are met. These requirements may be met through a range of services: from delivering a document, to providing a library program, to teaching reading skills, to sponsoring community meetings, to holding a story hour.

The public library can meet its responsibility by convening a community planning committee, representative of all the educational and informing organizations in the community, to determine how these organizations can best work together to ensure that each resident is appropriately served.

This planning committee should include the educational agencies in the community as well as representatives of client and other interest groups. The task of the committee would be to survey the educational state of the community and to implement ways of cooperatively improving that state.

G. Reporting on the Public Library Educational role

Earlier in this paper, the educational function of the public library was argued to be the most justifiable for public funding. The educational function is intended as a broad, rather than narrow, term--including not only support for homework assignments, for literacy programs, or for formal instructional programs but also the educational benefits derived from one user reading a book of interest, obtaining the answer to a question or understanding of a problem, or attending a library program. The public library's special contribution is that individual users can obtain the unique educational resource needed at the time needed and in the form found most useful.

In order for this educational function to be recognized and appreciated by the funding communities, public libraries need to make the educational function much more visible. In addition to a regular program of news releases to local newspapers and calendars of events, a public library could prepare an annual educational report to its community. The report should describe

the rationale for the public library as an educational institution, enumerate the clientele for this function, give the educational goals and objectives for the previous year and report on their achievement. Specific educational activities should be described with numbers served by each activity. This rationale can be presented and reviewed each year.

The point of the report would be to communicate the educational contribution the public library makes to the community.

Along with increasing public awareness of the educational contribution of the public library, more stable and more ambitious funding levels can be sought.

V. CONCLUSION: THE PUBLIC LIBRARY RESPONSE

The risks to which the National Commission on Excellence in Education alerts us must be taken seriously, and public libraries should not fail to respond with their special contribution.

The public library is an institution that provides individualized services. It is ideally suited to serve the adult learner who is not asking to return to the classroom but to be able to work toward an individual goal.

The public library is seen as a neutral institution that can

convene community meetings on educational excellence.

Volunteer informational and educational agencies in the community generally welcome public library support. The public library is acknowledged to be better able to obtain, organize, and deliver information. The public library can provide stability for agencies that depend on fluctuating funds and volunteer interests.

Finally, public libraries are working in an area of unlimited opportunity for growth. The learning needs of the community will continue to increase and at ever greater speed. Educational agencies are not competing for clients. Current estimates place over half the United States workforce in information related occupations, and the proportion is expected to grow to two-thirds by the year 2000. Those already oriented to information use will continue to demand services from public libraries. The person who buys books, subscribes to journals, and attends adult education classes is most likely to be a frequent library user. A marketing manager for USA Today observed that this new newspaper does best in cities with strong local newspapers because newspaper readers will buy another newspaper, but in communities that do not support newspapers, USA Today will also not do well.

In addition to serving the high information consumer, the

public library has the special mission to help all citizens participate fully in the Learning Society. Literacy is the basic requirement for participation. Public libraries can help prevent adult illiteracy by supporting quality public education and can reduce illiteracy by joining or leading local coalitions for literacy.

Beyond the basic requirement of literacy, participation in the Learning Society requires continual updating of knowledge, ability to negotiate overwhelming quantities of information, and information delivery tailored to the interests and abilities of the learner. The public library, as the community agency charged with fostering full participation by all residents, is designed for these tasks and can, through coordination of community resources, support the progress toward excellence.

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1. For a review of eight recent, nationally sponsored reports on education, see J. Lynn Griesemer and Cornelius Butler, Education under study: an analysis of recent major reports on education. Chelmsford, MA: The Northeast Regional Exchange, Inc., 1983.

2. Business-Higher Education Forum, America's Competitive Challenge: The Need for a National Response, 1983, p. 22. (Business-Higher Education Forum, Suite 800, One Dupont Circle, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036)

3. A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 8.

4. B. Dalton Bookseller, News Release, Minneapolis, August 31, 1983.

5. Herbert Goldhor, "University of Illinois annual survey," American Libraries XIV, September 1983, p. 537.

6. 1977 public library data are from the LIBGIS III survey as reported in Donald J. Sager, "Research Report on the American Public Library, Report Number: OCLC/OPR/RR-82/1, Dublin, OH: OCLC, 1982.

7. Patricia Glass Schuman, "Libraries and Alternatives," in James P. Danky and Elliott Shore, eds. Alternative Materials in Libraries, Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1982, p. 1

8. "Less Access to Less Information by and about the U. S. Government," ALA Washington Newsletter, XXXIV, July 26, 1982.

9. Book trade statistics are from the Bowker Annual of Library and Book Trade Information.

10. Herbert Goldhor, "University of Illinois annual survey," American Libraries, XIII, July/August 1982, p. 458 and XIV, September 1983, p. 534.

11. Vernon E. Palmour. et al A Planning Process for Public Libraries, Chicago: ALA, 1980.

12. Douglas L. Zweizig and Eleanor Jo Rodger, Output Measures for Public Libraries, Chicago: ALA, 1982.

13. Chicago: ALA, 1979.

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15. Sager, pp. 5, 10.

16. Douglas Zweizig and Brenda Dervin, "Public Library Use, Users, Uses: Adva in Knowledge of the Characteristics and Needs of the Adult Clientele of America Public Libraries" in Melvin J. Voigt and Michael H. Harris, eds. Advances in Librarianship, Volume 7. N.Y.: Academic Press, 1977, p. 237.

17. Sager, pp.24,25.

18. See Schuman, loc.cit.

19. Herbert Goldhor, unpublished report, 1983.

20. Sager, p. 19.